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Outside Expert: Police Officer Killed Roger Owensby

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Cyril H. Wecht

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A nationally known medical expert has given the city of Cincinnati his opinion on how suspect Roger Owensby, Jr. died in police custody nearly two years ago.

Dr. Cyril Wecht, coroner for Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, concluded that Owensby died from "mechanical asphyxia due to compression of his chest by police Officer Robert Blaine Jorg, who was kneeling on his back."

"Mechanical asphyxia is a form of suffocation wherein 'pressure on the outside of the body prevents respiration,'" Wecht's report stated. "In traumatic asphyxia a 'heavy weight presses down on an individual's chest abdomen, making respiration impossible.' A common example, which I have seen several times, is from a car slipping off a jack and pressing on a person under it..."

"In my opinion these hemorrhages were created by the complete weight of Officer Jorg's body directed through his knees into Mr. Owensby's back," the report continued.

Wecht's report stated that he had reviewed police reports, legal documents, sworn statements, scene and autopsy photographs, microscopic tissue slides, and "other relevant information" before compiling his report.

During Jorg's trial in Cincinnati, testimony was inconclusive on the exact cause of death. The case ended with a hung jury and prosecutors decided not to retry Jorg.

Owensby died in Bond Hill in November 2000.

Wecht was hired by the city of Cincinnati's Office of Municipal Investigation to look into Owensby's death. The Office of Municipal Investigation, an independent department the city, investigates complaints. He delivered his report to the city's Office of Municipal Investigation by fax on September 10, 2002. On September 11, 2002, Wecht's office confirmed to the city that the faxed copy was his final report.

The report was expected on August 23, 2002, but additional questions were submitted to Wecht, causing delays in completion of the report.



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